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RR RUEHTRO
DE RUEHAS #2162 3531651
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 191651Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2584
INFO RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0424
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0841
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1470
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2032
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1556
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6408
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 2823

UNCLAS ALGIERS 002162

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

TUNIS FOR MULREAN AND WOLCOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: DETAINED JOURNALIST RELEASED, TRIES TO KEEP LOW
PROFILE

REF: A. ALGIERS 01894

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 01940

[1](#)1. (SBU) On December 18 Algerian authorities released the director of the low-circulation Arabic-language daily "El Fedjr" following her incarceration December 7 on year-old charges of bouncing a check for USD 21,400 to a government-owned printing company. Hadda Hazzam's lawyer refused to comment on the case, but the head of Algeria's union of journalists said she had been released after paying an unspecified fine. Hazzam was arrested at the Algiers airport while waiting to board a flight to Beirut to attend a conference of Arab journalists. The top administrator at El Fedjr conceded that Hazzam had signed the check in question, but claimed that it had been prepared by a "dishonest accountant" who no longer worked for the newspaper. According to Hazzam's brother, she did not know about the outstanding arrest warrant, which happened to contain the address of a house she had not occupied in years. In addition, an Embassy contact in the Algerian border police told us that Hazzam was carrying at the time of her arrest a "significant amount of money" that she claimed was for shopping in Lebanon but had not declared to Algerian customs. (Note: All passengers leaving Algeria must declare cash holdings in excess of USD 10,000. End note.)

[1](#)2. (SBU) Hazzam was one of four women featured in "Algeriennes," a MEPI-sponsored documentary about contemporary Algerian women that opened in November (ref A). El Fedjr receives training and technical assistance under a MEPI-sponsored program affiliated with New York University. The paper's reputation is one of nonpartisanship and gradually improving journalistic tradecraft, but also generally poor financial management. Besides the debt it has incurred to the government, El Fedjr pays its journalists relatively low wages, according to journalist contacts.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In contrast to other jailed reporters, such as Mohammed Benchicou and the two journalists sentenced in October for defamation of Moammar Qadhafi (ref B), Hazzam struggled to maintain a low profile from prison. An Embassy journalist contact told us that Hazzam was irate that Algerian papers had covered her arrest despite her demands not to do so. Hazzam's brother implored the secretary general of the Algerian journalists union to instruct the press not to cover what he characterized as a mere "family issue" -- a possible reference to Hazzam's financial problems resulting from an ongoing divorce.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: We have seen no indication that Hazzam's arrest is a result of the editorial policies of her paper or of her personal affiliation with MEPI. Hazzam's longstanding debt to the Algerian government seems the likely cause of her incarceration. Hazzam is a well-known newspaper editor; her brother's claim that the original arrest warrant went to the wrong address seems dubious at best. It is not clear at this time whether her silence is a reflection of her culpability, desire for privacy for her family, or deeper fear -- justified or not -- of government reaction. End Comment.

¶5. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
DAUGHTON